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Violence and Trauma: The Story of Lost Innocence in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*

Abstract:

As an illuminating artistic work *Sleeping on Jupiter* weaved several issues regarding sexual violence, trauma, exploitation, taboos still pervading in the mainstream culture of Indian society. Nomita Frederiksen, a vibrant young-traveller of twenty-five-years old witnessed the bloodied-civil violence, became orphan and was rescued by treacherous hypocrite Guruji and then again adopted by a Norwegian family, returned to India to weave the lost thread of her displaced childhood at Jamruli. Intertwined the parallel story of three middle-aged women tired from domestic mundaneness come for a holiday at Jamruli; the homosexual love story of tourist guide Badal and the errand-tea shop boy Raghu; the story of a monk who overpowers Nomi's photography-assistance Suraj. This paper seeks to locate the traumas that she had experienced in highlighting the psychosomatic condition of her present state of mind.

Key Words: Childhood memories, aberaction, innocence, trauma, violence, taboos.

Introduction:

Published in 2015, Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter* is a stark and unflinching novel in which the ink inked the unexpected connections between devotion and violence. In Roy's terms, memories are coded with experiences, "like fungus that takes birth in warm and wet places, memories ooze from the crevices of your brain: spawned there, living and dying there, unrelated to anything in the world outside, the slime can coat everything until you can't tell the real from the imagined" (Roy 37-8). Unfolding the messages through symbolic acts might lead to the dark labyrinth of one's past by piercing the veil of one's subjective experiences.

Unfolding the Memories:

Memories loaded with experiences, perceptions, and misperceptions, are therefore the untold stories, "structured as language." (Lacan 203) Memories could become distorted by our several socio-psychological needs both at the point of encoding as well as at the point of recall. Each of us has been subjected to this ongoing process, but children have added limitations that complicate their ability to remember events. The real challenge was how could she help herself to become less frozen in the past, to afford her sufficient perspective that she might be able to reclaim those lost threads of herself that had been left behind. When she was forced beyond her ability to tolerate or integrate her experience, she did nothing but recognize the trauma in ways that might have protected her and helped her to heal. The civil-violence she has witnessed in

Roy's words:

Their faces were wrapped in cloth. They shoved my brother outside, they pushed my mother and me to a corner of the room, and then they flung my father at all. They slammed his face at the

wall again and again. The whitewashed wall streamed red, they threw him to the floor and kicked him with their booted feet. Each time the boots hit him, it was as if a limp bundle of clothes was being tossed this way and that. One of the men lifted an axe and brought it down on my father's forehead. (Roy 10)

Nomi, as an independent subject in need of care, support, and respect spent her life looking in all the wrong places for that gleam she sensed she needed, even though she might have lost touch with any idea of what was being sought. The child who failed to find herself in the gleam in her parent's eye due to any cause was a lost soul. The deficit, then, was experienced by her, was a painful absence that could not be relieved. Because the gleam was linked with the parents, we can spend our lives seeking out exactly the types of disappointments that are too familiar. Nomi was not an exceptional case; the "gleam" creaked into her life in the ashram, at least she thought so. But, "the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape," as Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*. (Shakespeare 59) What she might have been thought as paternal love, was the constant abdominal act of child abuse in the name of "divine sanction."

"Wounded Innocence" in the name of Divine Sanction:

The ghastly experiences in her life had oozed out:

This is not just a dream; a ghastly real-life experience that she had gone through in the name of divine sanction. She had been rescued, fed and looked after properly just to be butchered when the time would come. Guruji's self –proclamation, "I am your father and your mother now. I am your country. I am your teacher. I am your God." (Roy 37)

Nomi, the younger one started to believe the falsification of religiosity as truth and was petrified to question when in the disguise of a pedophile¹ Guruji said, “Don’t you think I will always do everything for your good? Didn’t I save you from the war and from starving on the streets without your parents?”(Roy 91) Bringing the allusion of Mahabharata’s Lakshman-line, the author penned how the children were manipulated and taught not to overstep the prescribed lines of gender roles and feminine morality when Padma masi said, “Stay inside the line, never go out. Understand?” This is what we were taught at the ashram: that we were never to go outside. Outside the line was danger. Outside we would be killed or locked up in jail.”(Roy 41)

Jagnu, one of the disciples of Guruji once shouted at the inhumane brutality of the confinement of the children was beaten to death, and Guruji poked Jugnu with his feet in the end as if his feet were nudging a sack of mud. No questions could be raised against authority-against Guruji: he was the authority. Women, children had been fallen to Guruji’s sexual appetite, often more the vulnerable the victim the more outrageous was the abuse. Blind faiths and our societal norms are the reasons why the families often send off their children and women to the Gurujis, and it takes too much time to shatter the illusion of faith. We need to think why the Indian culture is so brutal

¹ According to the DSM IV-TR, a pedophile is one who has recurrent or intense sexually arousing fantasies, urges, or behaviors involving sexual behavior with children, usually under the age of thirteen . American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 4th edition, text revision (Washington, Dc: American Psychiatric Press,2000),p.572.

to women and children and why does India defend rape in the name of religious protection from the beginning?

Replaying of the traumatic event through plays or other activities to resolve the traumatic experience is called aberaction². For example, children who have experienced a car accident will draw pictures of car wrecks, play with toy cars and crash them together, and perform other such behaviors through which they can relive the event. It is prominent in the child's drawings, clay creations, and other forms of play. Nomi as a child no exceptional, at least her activities at her foster mother's house say so, “[...] I had filled drawing books with dead birds, broken weathervanes and barbed wire. She wondered why didn't I draw some happy pictures. Flowers, the sun, green meadows...”(Roy 44) She wanted to “experience” the past to resolve that moment: At one of the windows was a bird in a cage. This one was definitely alive: it hopped about the stretched. It had glossy green feathers on its back and a red band at its throat. Maybe when I was out on the flowerbed at that time, it was the bird making those strange screaming noises. (Roy 90)

Numbers, colors, objects, and events seem so laden with meaning that it is hard to explore them, and yet meaning is everywhere, as she moved from association to association, becoming lucid and then retreating into more highly symbolized and abstract speech patterns that have

² Psychoanalytical term for the vivid, often cathartic return

of painful emotion(s) from past circumstances. The patient may have been conscious of the emotion/memory beforehand, or it may suddenly emerge from repression in the subconscious.

idiosyncratic rather than consensual meanings. As she was suffering from PTSD³, that traumatic experience was persistently re-experienced in one or more of the following ways: unwanted images, memories, thoughts, or perceptions of the event; recurrent dreams about the event. She acted or felt as if she was actually reliving the event and experiences in flashbacks, which included hallucinations and illusions of the event taking place again and again. Intense psychological distress led to the pathological condition when she encountered “cues” such as photographs, images, sounds, or symbols that were reminders of the event rendered increased blood pressure or heart rate. Charles, Marilyn in his book *Working with Trauma: Lessons From Bion and Lacan* used Bion’s ideas about *attacks on linking* and Lacan’s ideas about *empty speech*, to understand the traumas of the children which we can also use as lenses to grapple with differences encountered in this work with individuals who have suffered from intrusion versus neglect. As a deprived child, Nomi’s psyche was fractured, fragmented, and traumatized. The lack of parental care creates a gap in the child; the fragmented individual became unable to know, to perceive information that would be vital in making sense of dangers, real and imagined. In Bion’s terms, the confrontation, in the case of trauma appears between what we perceive and register. There is a part of us that resists knowing more than we can tolerate. Although this resistance can be adaptive in moments of acute distress, warding off painful knowledge over time can keep us locked in limbo, unable to integrate the information and move on. For those whose histories have been marked by severe trauma, there is a gap between the person’s

³ Post-traumatic stress disorder, often referred to as PTSD, is a psychological disturbance that occurs after observing or being involved in a severely traumatic or horrifying event.

capacities and the ability to use those capacities adaptively. Although the gap that complains and fights to override it, it is often that very gap that marks the problem and invites us to look further. The gap insists that something happened that is too important to be glossed over. Lacan's ideas about *empty speech* reveal that trauma fragments meaning, leaving us crippled and unable to put pieces of our lives together sufficiently to make sense of our own life stories and move on with our lives. Because of the traumatic experience related to her body Nomi's mind always reciprocated violently whenever any physical connection she had gone made. The "shower episode" happened out of love between Nomi and Suraj turned out to be a mess while Nomi slipped off from his hands and cracked her head. That was just an accident. But, Nomi's voice was completely changed and "*the link*" she found was "*empty*" in her low monotone that was not her:

"I don't believe your bullshit," she said. "I'm through." She lifted her hands as if holding a gun. She pressed. His hands flew to his eyes, but it was too late [...], And she was coming at him again with a knife. His own carving knife from the toolkit on the bedside table. (Roy 230)

If we think of Bion 's ideas regarding "*attacks on linking*," we can perhaps better recognize the bits and fragments of current and history that she offered. Her distress was such that these bits are so interspersed with dream and fantasy that it is difficult for us to separate or catalogue the pieces. Rather, we are left with a dialogue in which conscious and unconscious co-exist, interwoven into the type of fabric that has become Nomi's daydream nightmare from which she cannot escape:

There is a dream I often have. I am a baby in it, held aloof by a man. He is on his back on a bed, his legs are bent at the knee, he is holding me high above him, my face is above his face, his hands are my arms, and he is rocking on his back until he almost somersaults. He takes me each

time to the brink. Then is still for a second. After that, he rocks backward again. I want to beg him to stop, but my voice has died, and I can't say a word. I wake up soaked in sweat. (Roy 34)

Trauma and Menstrual Myth:

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler wrote, "For surely body live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain and pleasure, endure illness and violence, and these 'facts'...cannot be dismissed as mere construction."(Butler 11) Body as a mute sex object subjected to sexual gratification, an underlying notion of patriarchy is significantly traced back the grotesqueness and grossness. Since the concept of sexuality has been essentially a male paradigm, the hegemonic value system expects women community to assimilate the indignity and feign silence and secrecy in controversial episodes like rape and sexual abuses:

Patriarchal force also relies on a form of violence particularly sexual in character and realized most completely in the act of rape... In rape, the emotion of aggression, hatred, contempt and the desire to break or violence personality, take a form consummately appropriate to sexual politics." (Butler 44)

Menstruation and female sexuality have been subjected to politics of sexuality throughout the ages with relevant examples in literature, myth, in primitive and civilized life, even so, it is striking how the notion persists to-day. "The event of menstruation, for example, is a largely clandestine affair, and the psycho-social effect of the stigma attached must have great effect on the female ego."(Millett 47) Society considers it as a taboo; women are often subjected to isolation in huts at the edge of the village as this biological process is a matter of shame to the family while they bleed. Menstruation as a matter of "curse," explains the fundamental socio-cultural phenomena of the female's genitals.vis-à-vis wound or mutilation. Once she was wounded, now she bleeds. The suffering during their period is often likely to be psychosomatic,

rather than physiological, cultural rather than biological, in origin. The body becomes an object of “shame” or an unbearable burden to carry on. “Contemporary slang for the vagina is gash.”(Millett 47) The Freudian description of the female genitals arouse in patriarchal societies is attested to though religious, cultural, and literary proscription. In pre-literate groups, fear is also a factor, as in the belief in a castrating “*vagina dentate*.”(Millett 47) The penis stands as a badge of the male's superiority attributed the most crucial significance of endless boasting and endless domination. The unbearable pain both bodily and psychologically, Nomi had to endure made her a progeny of trauma reverberating the untold stories of so many women in our society.

On the seventh day of my confinement, I was made to wash my hair with shampoo and bathe with a new bar of soap... Padma Devi lined my eyes with kajal saying,” Can you see colours with black eyes? Or is everything black?” She gave me a set of new clothes [...] I waited as I had been told, for Guruji to arrive and perform his rituals. (Roy 173)

And what is the ritual? An obnoxious task in the name of religious performance retained well under the veil of religious myth- the raping of a child, a purification process by Guruji. She was “the chosen one.”(Roy 173) The privilege to be a chosen one surely is a blessing. She was taught that she was “a nun in the service of God”(Roy 173) and it was not sexual harassment, but it was Guruji’s exalted soul reaching out to her soul that deserved to be elevated. No consent is sought or obtained because rape is packaged as a healing process or another form of blessing:

He held my face between his hands and stuck his greasy lips on my lips, pushed his tongue in. It felt like a snake. I remember the way he kept stroking my body at first over my clothes; then his hands went under them [...] He stuffed a cloth into my mouth to stop me shouting for help. I remember my screams made no sound. (Roy 174)

There was rebellious one too, Piku, who was punished for not going to Guruji. "She wasn't allowed into the school or the dining hall. She ate outside, tied to that smelly sack, flies buzzing around."(Roy 174) Moreover, when Nomi went to help her, she was punished too despite being "chosen one": three days in the kennel shed, with six dogs ate scraps from their bowls.

Isolation and Alienation:

If we take seriously the isolation and alienation that imprisons Nomi in her solitary universe, then our best course would seem to be to try to cross the threshold of her world as best as we can. She denoted to an equally inchoate series of "unfortunate events" that had landed her in her current state, which she intended to remediate with due expediency. She was struggling to locate her "lost" voice as a part of a symphony of a parched soul lost in the name of divine sanction in the ashram:

His hand went up my thighs and down. He shifted my weight and slipped down my knickers and put his hand right between my legs. He lifted his own robes, and he pulled my hand towards himself and said," Hold this, it is magic." It struck out from between his legs like a stump. (Roy 93)

She tried to understand her own self in her own context, to build a story in which the negotiated making sufficient sense that she could find a path that sustained her, rather than being so idiosyncratic and overcontrolled that any intrusion disrupted her and sent her reeling, "for years she had done nothing but gathering information and courage. Bit by bit she had mended together the details, waited for a chance to come back, to see for herself. Then this assignment took place. It had worked out".(Roy 115) She tries to create a space that might allow her to settle into her own thoughts and report about her cosmos so that we can envisage a way to survive the disarray and move towards a more coherent and integrated order that won't be so easily crumbled.

Conclusion:

The little child who had been harassed so mercilessly escaping became a way of being sufficiently light to float through her life without the burdens of disdain and isolation. In the end, she could perhaps begin to acknowledge the pain as a cohesive part of her past instead an irresolvable circuit she moved through repeatedly, relentlessly, in the magical hope of finally breaking through into that other alternative dimension in which failure was not inevitable: She reaches the desolate ashram in the long past midnight. She slides into the lake; her body – mind slowly grasps the calmness, the howling storm, the gusty wind calm down in her mind. She bathes for a long time. After taking the bath, she brings out a small stone statue- a little girl with two braids gesturing as if she wants to escape. She drops it into the lake's water [...] she looks up to orient herself: one side the opal sky is turning pink. (Roy 249-50)

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